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Anarchism, Poststructuralism and the Future of Radical Politics

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In the post-Marxist era—in the time defined, in other words, by the eclipse of Marxism and the state socialist projects that emerged in its name—it would seem that radical left politics is adrift in uncertain waters. It would appear that we are living, as Jacques Rancière would say, in the age of "post-politics," where the global neo-liberal consensus is shared by the parliamentary Right and Left alike (an ideological distinction that has become, at the formal level, largely meaningless) and where the very idea of emancipation is now regarded by many as a dangerous and outdated illusion. However, this sterile space has been disrupted in recent years by the unleashing of new reactionary forces—the political emergence of the Far Right, the uncanny appearance of religious fundamentalism (and not just of the Islamic variety), as well as the aggressive and violent reassertion of the authoritarian state under the dubious pretext of "security."

All this would not seem to bode well for any sort of radical politics of emancipation. Indeed, the dominant ideological message today is to accept the "rules of the game"—to accept, in other words, free-market economics and the "security" state, the only alternative being fundamentalist terrorism. Indeed, "terrorism" has shown itself to be a mobile and infinitely extendible signifier that can now be applied to virtually any form of dissident activity, even—and especially—in our so-called liberal democracies. Despite these constraints, however, there have been signs of a certain revitalization of radical left politics—in particular, the anti-capitalist and anti-war protests that have taken place around the world in recent years. These protest movements suggest new forms of radical politics that break with traditional Marxist categories of class and economic struggles, and at the same time go beyond the particularistic and ultimately conservative logic of identity politics. While these struggles are made up of different and heterogeneous identities, and are not subordinated to the universal subjectivity of the proletariat, they are at the same time mobilized around universal issues and concerns—the current course of capitalist globalization, and the permanent state of war through which it is now articulated.

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Importantly, these movements are anti-authoritarian and non-institutional. They resist the centralizing tendencies of many radical struggles that have taken place in the past, and they do not aim at seizing state power as such, or utilizing the mechanisms and institutions of the state. In this sense, they can be seen as anarchist struggles—and they bear a distinct reference to the anarchist tradition of anti-authoritarian, anti-centralist politics. Here I will suggest that anarchism—as a political philosophy and activist tradition—can be seen as the hidden referent for radical political struggles today. This is reflected in a number of contemporary debates in continental theory over the future of radical politics. Thinkers as diverse as Laclau, Badiou, Rancière, Hardt and Negri, and Derrida have all sought, in different ways, to diagnose and redefine radical politics, and to explore its possibilities in the wake of Marxism. However, despite their silence on the subject, they all implicitly invoke—if the logic of their arguments is to be examined—some form of anarchist or anti-authoritarian politics of emancipation. Here I will show how anarchist theory can intervene in these debates, and allow a rethinking and renewal of radical political thought. However, anarchism as a philosophy is itself in need of rethinking: it remains mired in a positivist and humanist framework that to some extent limits its radical innovativeness. Postanarchism can be seen as a project of renewing the anarchist tradition through a critique of essentialist identities and the assertion instead of the contingency of politics.

Toward a New Radical Politics

If we examine debates within continental theory over the current status and future directions of radical politics, a number of themes become apparent. Among them are: a common rejection of statist and institutional forms of politics; a critique of the politics of representation and a loss of faith in the party; a questioning of the traditional Marxist category of class; and, yet, a continuing fidelity to the classical emancipative ideals of liberty and equality.

1) Politics beyond the state

The state remains one of the central and most persistent problems of radical politics. Revolutions in the past have attempted to seize state power with the view to its eventual "withering away;" however, the result has often been a strengthening and expansion of the state, and with it a repression of the very revolutionary forces that sought to control it. This is the problem that I have termed the "place of power"—the structural imperative of the state to perpetuate itself even in moments of

revolutionary upheaval (see Newman 2001). Alain Badiou also sees this problem as being of fundamental importance:

> More precisely, we must ask the question that, without a doubt, constitutes the great enigma of the century: why does the subsumption of politics, either through the form of the immediate bond (the masses), or the mediate bond (the party) ultimately give rise to bureaucratic submission and the cult of the State? (2005: 70)

In other words, perhaps there is something in the political forms that revolutions have taken in the past that led to the perpetuation of the state. We might recall that this was the same problem that classical anarchists during the nineteenth century confronted in their debates with Marx. Anarchists like Mikhail Bakunin warned of the dangers of a workers' revolution that sought not to dismantle the state, but to seize control of it and use it to complete the revolution. He predicted that this would end up in the emergence of a new bureaucratic class of technocrats who would exploit and oppress workers and peasants, much in the same way as the old class system did (Bakunin 1973: 266).

Moreover, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the political and ideological conflict between liberal-democracy and totalitarianism, has allowed us to confront, for the first time, the specific problem of state power. In other words, liberal-democracy and Communism merely served as the ideological masks of the state. These fictions have now fallen away and the true face of sovereignty has been laid bare. This dull visage is merely one of naked power: a power that no longer tries to justify itself legally or normatively; a power that now operates more or less with total impunity in the name of guaranteeing our security—or, to be more, precise, creating a permanent state of insecurity in order to legitimize its existence. Indeed, we might say that the "war on terrorism"—with its permanent state of emergency and war—merely operates as the state's latest and flimsiest ideological fiction, a desperate attempt by the state to disguise its absence of legitimate foundation. In its new "security" mode, the liberal-democratic state is becoming increasingly indistinguishable from the authoritarian police state. As Giorgio Agamben argues, the modern state now has the provision of security—or some illusion of security—as its sole purpose. The guarantee of security has become, in other words, the ultimate standard of the state's political legitimacy. However, the danger of this new "security" paradigm is that there will emerge a sort of structural complicity between the state and terrorism, each relying on the other for its existence, and each provoking the other to even greater acts of violence—something we are already seeing signs of (Agamben 2002).

The violence and lawlessness of the "security" paradigm thus reveals the true face and hidden secret of state sovereignty—which, according to Agamben, is the *state of exception*. This refers to the central legal paradox or aporia upon which all sovereignty is based—the provision that allows the law itself to be suspended in times of national crisis and emergency (see Agamben 2005). Through the state of exception, the sovereign occupies an ambiguous position in relation to the law, being both inside and outside the law simultaneously: the sovereign guarantees the juridical order (the power to enforce the law, essentially) by standing outside it and, thus, having the power to suspend the law at certain moments through the act of unilateral decision. The condition of sovereignty, in other words, is marked by this radical *indistinction* between law and lawlessness. Recently, we have seen state power articulating itself more and more through the state of exception: governments giving themselves extraordinary powers to permanently detain "suspects" and to suspend normal constitutional rights and judicial processes. In other words, the state of emergency, so far from being an aberration, increasingly becomes the normal condition of sovereignty: *the state of exception becomes the rule*.

State sovereignty might be understood, then, as embodying an extra-legal dimension of violence. In other words, what must be questioned here is the idea of the state being based on the rule of law. This desire to strip the analysis of state sovereignty of all legal fictions can be also found in classical anarchism. Thinkers like Bakunin and Kropotkin refused to be deceived by social contract theorists, those apologists for the state like Hobbes and Locke, who saw sovereignty as being founded on rational consent and the desire to escape the state of nature. For Bakunin, this was a fiction, an "unworthy hoax," for if in the state of nature people were living a savage existence, bereft of rationality, morality and sociability, then upon what basis could this act of consent take place? (Bakunin 1984: 136) In other words, the social contract is merely a mask for the illegitimacy of the state – the fact that sovereignty was imposed violently on people, rather than emerging through their rational consent.[1]

Nor does democracy make the state any more palatable. Democracy—or the miserable parliamentary version of it that we have today—is merely another representative fiction that disguises the reality of state domination. Anarchists regarded democratic parliamentary regimes with the same contempt as authoritarian or monarchical regimes—in fact, the former may well be more insidious because it creates the illusion that state power is based on consent and popular sovereignty. In reality, however, the state is always the same—its structural principle

is always domination and violence, no matter what form it takes. Whether it be the monarchical state, the parliamentary state or even the workers' state, the violence of the sovereign always lurks just below the surface. For Bakunin, then, despotism resided "not so much in the form of the State but in the very principle of the State and political power" (1984: 221).

Today democracy has become nothing more than a media spectacle—a purely formal and increasingly meaningless ritual characterized by "spin doctoring" and the fetishism of opinion polls. The fact that democratic governments ignored the protests of hundreds of thousands of their citizens in 2003 against the war in Iraq shows what formal democracy has become in the post-September 11 world. Democracy is simply the organizer of the capitalist neo-liberal consensus: in other words, democracy—or capitalist parliamentarianism, as Badiou prefers to call it—refers today to little more than the free market. Worse still, it has become the standard bearer for Western militarism: "democracy" as a signifier is used to enforce a series of discursive divisions between the "civilized" West and "barbaric" East, between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic, between "us" and "them;" it is used to divide the political field, separating democratic or "democratizing" regimes from "rogue states"—those that may be subject to military intervention.

Capitalist-democracy has become the reigning ideology: it is the formal injunction and ultimate stamp of acceptability for any regime. It is impossible today not to be a democrat and not to embrace the free market. This creates a problem for radical politics, because to play the formal democratic game always leads to the affirmation of the state. Democracy is simply a form or guise that the state has taken. Radical left politics must therefore avoid representationalist forms that only perpetuate the state. It must generate its own non-institutionalized modes of politics that are not prescribed by the state. Part of this would involve, as Badiou puts it, contesting the democratic consensus. This does not mean rejecting the concept of democracy itself; rather, it means inventing new forms of radical and egalitarian democracy that do not involve participating in state institutions. Badiou says: "So, can 'democracy' be relevant? Yes, I shall say so, as long as 'democracy' is grasped in a sense other than a form of the State." (2005: 85)

Therefore, any form of radical democratic politics must "put the State at a distance," as Badiou says (2005: 145). In other words, radical politics today should no longer have as its aim to seize control of the state. The state is much too powerful for frontal assaults of this kind. Indeed, for Badiou, the modern state is characterized by its excessive

superpower—a power that is errant, undefined and unlimited. That is to say, the power of the state resides in the fact that we do not really know how powerful it is: we have no way of measuring its power, and we therefore feel powerless in its massive and ubiquitous presence. By placing the state at a distance—by refusing the statist form and inventing new forms of direct, participatory democracy—radical politics acts to measure and thus limit the power of the state. In other words, radical politics—if it emerges from and creates spaces that are beyond the reach of the state—can serve to highlight the limits of state power. Badiou gives several examples of this form of politics: the Maoist "liberated zones" in the Chinese revolutionary war, the EZLN controlled areas of Chiapas in Mexico, or *L'Organisation politique* that fights for the rights of "illegal" immigrant workers in France. I would add to this—much to Badiou's disapproval no doubt[2]—the demonstrations of the global anti-capitalist movement, demonstrations that have invented new forms of non-centralist and democratic decision-making, popular participation and protest. These are radical political events that take place beyond the grasp of the state and construct new, non-statist forms of political participation. It is precisely because of this that they present such a threat to the state, as shown, for example, by the massive security presence at the anti-globalization demonstrations. Political events such as these are where the state reveals itself in all its excessive power and brutality.

Contemporary radical politics is therefore a politics that avoids the form of the state—the seductive trap of state power that lay in wait for revolutionary movements in the past. It invents its own, non-institutional, decentralized forms of politics and mass participation that are not sanctioned by the state and that go beyond the formal parliamentary process. Implicit here is an anarchist style of politics that seeks not to take control of state power, but rather to create new, non-statist forms of communal association and direct democracy that would make the state irrelevant.

2) Politics beyond the Party

Similarly, radical politics today must avoid the representationalist form of political parties. The traditional Marxist parties of the Left have for a long time been in a state of crisis. In France, the phenomenal emergence of the Front Nationale in recent elections has been in a large part due to the disenchantment of the working class with the PCF and other traditional socialist parties. Moreover, political parties—whether

of the Left or Right—are simply part of the state apparatus. They only tie politics to the state, thus limiting its radical potential and creativity. This occurs not only in the parliamentary setting, but also in moments of revolution. The Bolshevik revolution, for instance, while it initiated forms of direct democracy through the Soviets, also channeled these into an increasingly centralized and authoritarian party apparatus. The party is an ultimately conservative institution and an arm of the state: the role of the French PCF during the May '68 insurrections, where it tried to reign in the militants, is testimony to this.

A number of continental and poststructuralist thinkers—emerging as many of them did from the experience of May '68—have largely rejected the mechanism of the political party, arguing for new forms of non-party political activism. Foucault, for instance, was critical of the representative role of the party—particularly the claim of parties of the Left that they were speaking on behalf of the masses. Instead, he preferred localized forms of militant politics that sought to express the views and positions of those who were actively involved in a particular situation or struggle—prisoners, for instance, or psychiatric patients and other wards of the state. Gilles Deleuze once said to Foucault in an interview: "You were the first . . . to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others" (See Foucault 1977: 209). Badiou, too, wants to see a politics that is no longer reliant on the representative function of the party. He sees the party—even the mass party—as being a form of social bond that only ties political struggles to the state. Real politics, by contrast, consists in an unbinding, an undoing of any social bond, and a subtraction of itself from state authority (Badiou 2005: 77). In a manner similar to Foucault, Badiou talks of situated struggles, such as those of "illegal" migrant workers, and suggests modes of political organization that do not seek to represent their constituents at the formal levels of power, but rather to highlight the conditions of a particular situation and to mobilize people around these specific conditions.

Again, this appeal to a politics that goes beyond formal party structures points implicitly to a kind of anarchism. Anarchists have always been suspicious of the institution of the party, particularly the revolutionary party, suggesting that it is essentially already a microcosm of the state—a future state in waiting. In other words, the party contains centralized and bureaucratic apparatuses that mirror the very power structures and hierarchies of the political order whose destruction it claims to seek. The revolutionary vanguard party, with its authoritarianism, centralism and emphasis on discipline, would reproduce, it was argued, the authoritarian structures of the state.[3]

3) Politics beyond class

The Marxist politico-economic category of class has also been questioned and largely rejected by contemporary radical political thought. Post-Marxist thinkers like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, for instance, have argued that class is an outdated and essentialist concept, which not only has limited empirical value—given the ever diminishing number of blue collar workers in Western post-industrial societies—but also excludes other political subjectivities and struggles, or at least relegates them to a position of secondary importance.

For Laclau and Mouffe, economic and class determinism constitute the central problem in Marxist theory, preventing it from being fully able to grasp the *political*—the field of political identities, power relations and antagonisms—in its specificity and contingency. They argue that the contemporary political field is no longer held together by the struggles of the proletariat, and that for some time it has been fragmented by a whole series of different and competing identities and movements-those of blacks, feminists, gays, ethnic minorities, students, environmentalists, consumers, and so on. Class is no longer the dominant category through which radical political subjectivity is defined: "The common denominator of all of them would be their differentiation from workers' struggles, considered as 'class' struggles" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 159).

Laclau and Mouffe also show the way in which the struggles of workers and artisans in the nineteenth century tended to be struggles against relations of subordination generally, and against the destruction of their organic, communal way of life through the introduction of the factory system and new forms of industrial technology such as Taylorism. They did not conform to Marx's notion of proletarians embracing the forces of capitalism in order to transform it. Similarly, Rancière has also questioned the Marxist vision of proletarian subjectivity: he documents the appearance, during the nineteenth century, of radical libertarian identities and discourses among workers that did not conform to the Marxist figure of the industrious, disciplined worker, suggesting that the proletariat itself was always much more heterogeneous and "anarchic" than Marxism allowed (see Rancière 1989). This refusal to reduce the struggles of workers to the specific Marxist vision of the proletarian struggle against capitalism would also be characteristic of the classical anarchist position, which emphasized the heterogeneity of subaltern subjectivities and antagonisms (the crucial role of the lumpenproletariat, for instance, which had been dismissed by Marx) and their primarily anti-authoritarian character. Anarchists sought to include other classes and social strata—such as peasants and intellectuals

déclassés—in the revolutionary struggle alongside the industrial proletariat. Indeed, Bakunin preferred the word "mass" to "class" to characterize this heterogeneous revolutionary identity—"class" implying hierarchy and exclusiveness (1950: 47). Anarchism therefore rejects the class and economic reductionism central to Marxist theory, insisting that it cannot account for the specificity, complexity and universality of political struggles.

4) The politics of emancipation

Despite this questioning of many of the hallowed concepts of Marxist theory, contemporary continental thinking still remains committed to the classical ideals of emancipation—particularly the central ideas of liberty and equality and their interconnectedness. As we know, liberalism has always seen these two ideas as mutually limiting, so that the more equality one had, the less liberty, and vice versa. However, what distinguishes the radical left political tradition—including anarchism, socialism and Marxism—is the refusal to separate these ideals. Full liberty could only come with full equality, and to see one as coming at the expense of the other was simply unjust. Thus Bakunin believed that freedom was only possible in society when all were equally free (1984: 267).

The *undeconstructability* of liberty and equality has been articulated in various ways by modern continental thinkers. Étienne Balibar, for instance, invokes *equaliberty* (*égaliberté*) to highlight the inextricable link between these two ideals (see 48-72). This might be interpreted as an unconditional and necessarily excessive political demand—the demand for full freedom and full equality, unlimited by the other and only possible *with* the other. This demand would remain unfulfilled and, in Derrida's terms, "infinitely perfectible"—thus forming an open ethical horizon for radical political struggles that can never be entirely grounded in any concrete normative or social order.

Other thinkers, like Badiou and Rancière, have seen equality as the ontological basis of radical politics itself—certainly not to the exclusion of liberty, but rather as something that incorporates a radical freedom and emancipation. Badiou calls for a radical egalitarian politics—a politics that is inconceivable and incomprehensible from the perspective of liberal market ideology and the state. Moreover, the *egalitarian postulation*, as he calls it, is present in an almost axiomatic sense in every real struggle for emancipation (2005: 112). Rancière, in a similar fashion, sees equality as the very ontological condition of any social order. This was the secret of the state of nature—this state of perfect equality and perfect liberty—that Hobbes tried to hide under the shadow of the sovereign. For Rancière,

then, politics is the irruption of this principle of equality, an irruption that destabilizes the hierarchical social order that rests so precariously upon it (1999: 16). For Rancière, politics emerges when an excluded subjectivity—that part which remains uncounted, excluded from political life (the poor, the demos)—claims for itself the universality of a whole community. In other words, politics emerges when the part that is not counted as part of the community claims to be whole. One example he gives of this political *dissensus* or "disagreement" is the claim of women during the French Revolution to be included in political processes: they did this by pointing to the gap that existed between the formal universality of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which guaranteed equal political rights to all, including women, and the reality of the political situation founded on these ideals, from which women were excluded. In other words, by pointing to the formal inscription of universal rights and equality, they could highlight the inconsistency of a situation in which they were deprived of their rights: "They acted as subjects that did not have the rights that they had and had the rights that they had not" (Rancière 2004, 306).

I have suggested so far that contemporary radical political thought, despite the differences and disagreements of among its key thinkers, converges around several themes: the problem of the state and the emergence of non-statist forms of politics; the rejection of party representation; the questioning of the Marxist category of economic class; and the invoking and rearticulation of the classical emancipative ideals of liberty and equality. I have also argued that these themes point to an anarchist or left-libertarian politics, a politics characterized by a resistance against the state, an eschewing of the party as a mode of representation, a rejection of the subjective category of class and an emphasis instead on heterogeneity, and an insistence on full, unconditional liberty and equality. In this sense, perhaps anarchism can be seen as the hidden referent for a contemporary radical politics. Given the decline of Marxism as both a political and theoretical project—and given the desire for a politics that avoids statism, authoritarianism, class essentialism and economism—perhaps it is time to invoke the anarchist tradition, or at least reflect more seriously upon it as a radical political alternative. It is surprising, given its theoretical proximity to the project of thinking radical politics in the post-Marxist era, that there is a general silence about anarchism on the part of the very thinkers who are engaged in this project. Badiou, Rancière, Laclau and Agamben all veer quite close towards anarchism in a number of important respects, and yet they make virtually no mention of the anarchist tradition at all.

Rethinking Anarchism

The central contribution of anarchism to radical political thought lies in its rejection of the state and all authoritarian forms of politics, its critique of Marxism, and its commitment to a libertarian and egalitarian ethos. In particular, the innovativeness of anarchism lies in its theorization of political power—namely the power of the state—as an autonomous field of power relations and a specific site of political struggles that was analytically separate from, and not determined by, the capitalist economy or class relations. This was why the state could not be trusted to "wither away" after the revolution: as an abstract machine of domination that had its own logic and rationality, it would only perpetuate itself through the guise of the workers' state. Therefore, by breaking the absolute structural link that Marxism had established between the political and the economic, anarchism performed a vital theoretical operation—one that foreshadowed later poststructuralist and post-Marxist interventions.

However, the theoretical innovativeness of anarchism today is, at the same time, limited by the humanist and positivist framework in which it was originally conceived, and which continues to inform, to a large extent, the thinking of modern anarchists like Noam Chomsky, John Zerzan and Murray Bookchin.[4] This epistemological framework is apparent in a number of central aspects of anarchist theory. For instance, while anarchists like Bakunin warned of the dangers of allowing life to be dictated to by scientists, both he and Kropotkin still saw society as an objective reality whose workings could be observed scientifically, particularly through the methodology of the natural sciences. Central here is the notion that socialism and the liberation of humanity have a materialist and scientific basis: there was a rational logic at work in society and history, a logic that was only intelligible through science.[5] For Bakunin, this logic consisted of what he saw as "immutable" natural laws that formed the basis of human and social development.[6] For Kropotkin, this rational social logic could be found in a natural sociability that he observed in humans and animals—a "permanent instinct" toward cooperation, which he believed could provide the foundation for a new ethics of mutual aid, and a new conception of justice and morality (see *Ethics* 1947; *Mutual Aid* 1955). Further, anarchism relies on an essentialist understanding of human nature as largely benign and cooperative. Indeed, for classical anarchists, the social revolution and the creation of a free society would allow man's immanent humanity and rationality finally to be realized.

However, the problem is that if we are to take the implications of poststructuralism seriously—and I think we should—then these epistemological conditions are no longer sustainable. For instance, rather than social objects being rationally discernible, they would be seen as discursively constructed. The socio-political field does not bear some objective, rational truth that science can reveal; rather it is characterized by multiple layers of articulation, antagonism and ideological dissimulation. The reason why Laclau and Mouffe believe that "society" is not a valid object of discourse is because it does not contain an objective reality hidden behind different discursive representations; rather society is constituted *through* these very representations. Social reality is *opaque*. Furthermore, political and social developments cannot be seen as being determined according to some immanent social or historical logic. Today we have to accept that politics is a contingent enterprise that is in many ways unpredictable. The ontological basis of politics is not the dialectic but the *event*. Moreover, the subject can no longer be seen as having essential moral and rational properties, as an aspect of his "humanity." Rather, the subject's identity is seen as constituted, albeit incompletely and indeterminately, through external social structures—language, discourse and power. The "human" is simply the void that falls between signifiers.

Many have suggested that these theoretical conditions impose unbearable restrictions upon radical politics, robbing it of any stable foundation or autonomous agency. I would argue, however, that in order for radical politics to be thought today, we must abandon the notion of stable foundations and fixed identities, and instead assert the contingency of the political. This notion of contingency has been theorized in a number of ways by contemporary thinkers. Badiou, for instance, sees it in terms of an unbinding or an undoing of social and community bonds. Politics, he argues is an enterprise of absolute singularity, where subjects detach themselves from existing social ties and identities and become consumed by a political process that destabilizes existing socio-political conditions. That is why politics—real politics—is an event, one that emerges in an unpredictable and singular fashion from the void that is at the basis of any situation. In other words, rather than, as anarchism maintains, the ontological ground being some immanent social rationality, and rather than revolutionary politics emerging in an organic way through the expansion of communities and social ties, the only ontological ground is the void, and the only radical politics comes from, or involves, the breakdown of these ties. Rancière also sees politics as involving a dislocation of existing social relations. Unlike the anarchists who pit

natural social relations against the artificiality of political power, Rancière locates what he calls the order of "the police"—the order of established hierarchies and identities—in these natural relations themselves.[7] And politics is precisely the disruption of this natural order of power. Similarly, Laclau sees politics as taking place on a ground of contingency and indeterminacy: political identities are not the outcome of the logic of history or the rational development of social forces; rather, they are the result of a hegemonic articulation among actors engaged in political struggles (1996: 53).

However, this emphasis on contingency, unpredictability and disruption does not amount to a politics of nihilism. On the contrary, it is informed, as I suggested, by the classical ideals of emancipation—an ethical lineage that it shares, along with its anti-authoritarianism, with anarchism. The spirit of the Enlightenment, with its belief in individual freedom and its rejection of obscurantism, still animates the radical politics of today. However, as Foucault believed, the Enlightenment can be interpreted in different ways, and its legacy is deeply ambiguous: on the one hand, there is the Enlightenment of rational certainty, absolute identity and destiny; and on the other, of continual questioning and uncertainty. It is the former that we should question and the latter that we should embrace. Moreover, Kant saw the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) as a critical condition, characterized by an "audacity to know" and the free and autonomous public use of reason. This critical condition is concomitant with a "will to revolution," with the attempt to understand revolution—in Kant's case, the French Revolution—as an event that allows an interrogation of the conditions of modernity, as well as the way that we as subjects stand in relation to it (see Foucault 1986). Foucault suggests that we may adopt this critical strategy to reflect upon the limits of the discourse of the Enlightenment itself, and its rational and moral injunctions. We may, in this sense, use the critical capacities of the Enlightenment against itself, thus opening up public spaces for autonomy, freedom and critical reflection within its edifice.

Similarly, Derrida, while he remains critical of the rationalist and positivist aspects of the Enlightenment, still wants to hang on to its emancipative and liberating potential—particularly its insistence on human rights. He calls for an unconditional defense of the notion of universal human rights, particularly in the face of the state's open violation of international human rights norms. However, at the same time, this notion of human rights—and its basis in the concept of the "human" itself—needs to be rethought and deconstructed (see Derrida in Borradori 2004: 132-3). These two positions are by no means

contradictory. On the contrary, it is only through a questioning of the ontological conditions—the assumed "naturalness" of human rights—that they can be reinvigorated.

The point here is that the legacy of the Enlightenment is heterogeneous, and it contains a subversive potential that is worth preserving, defending and even expanding. So far from poststructuralism dismissing the Enlightenment, as it has often been accused of doing, it seeks its radical renewal. My contention here is that Enlightenment—as the embodiment of the ideas of human emancipation and autonomy—must still serve as the referent and open horizon for radical political struggles today. This is especially true in the present era of neo-conservatism and religious fundamentalism, when the ideas of human rights, reason and individual freedom are being openly questioned and contested.

The Politics of Post-Anarchism

The Enlightenment provides, then, the common politico-ethical reference for radical politics, paradoxically uniting classical anarchism with contemporary continental thought. At the heart of both we find the desire to criticize and interrogate authority, the injunction to resist political domination, and the assertion of freedom, autonomy and equality—in short, an ethics of anti-authoritarian egalitarianism. Let us take a slight risk here and call this *post-anarchism*; despite the numerous objections that would be made by the thinkers I have discussed, we could perhaps say that their politics implies a kind of anarchism, albeit one that embraces contingency and indeterminacy and rejects essentialist identities and firm ontological foundations. In a paradoxical way, because these thinkers seek, in the name of emancipation, to destabilize all established social and political identities and discourses, they could be seen as perhaps *more* "anarchistic" than the classical anarchists.

A contemporary post-anarchist or libertarian-egalitarian politics must be able to rethink both sovereignty and universality. In the time of a pronounced intensification of state power, the radical politics of today can only counter this by inventing new forms of sovereignty—a popular sovereignty, a sovereignty of the people that does not lead to the sovereignty of the state. Derrida speaks of the emergence of a new kind of sovereignty—a *force without power*, "messianicty without messianism" (2005: xiv). Here he uses the example of the global anti-capitalist movement to characterize this new form of popular sovereignty, which

he sees as a sovereignty of the weak rather than a sovereignty of the strong:

> Movements that are still heterogeneous, still somewhat unformed, full of contradictions, but gather together the weak of the earth, all those who feel themselves crushed by the economic hegemonies, by the liberal market, by sovereignism etc. I believe it is these weak who will prove to be the strongest in the end and who represent the future. (see Derrida interview: 2004)

It is the global masses, the global "poor," that embody this new form of popular sovereignty.

Moreover, popular sovereignty—sovereignty beyond the state—also demands a rethinking of universality. There is no question that radical politics, if it is to go beyond the atomism of identity politics, must bear reference to some sort of universal dimension. But what should constitute this universal dimension: a universal equality, new understandings of rights, or even a new cosmopolitanism with global legal institutions and democratic mechanisms? Whatever the case, globalization—while it is, on the one hand, privatizing, individualizing and thus eroding traditional public spaces of political discourse—is also opening up new possibilities for universality in politics. The status of this universality—how it is defined, who controls it, how democratic and egalitarian it is—will increasingly become the site of political struggles everywhere. A politics of post-anarchism must construct new forms of universality around which all those heterogeneous groups and subjectivities that are today marginalized, dominated and exploited in different ways by global state capitalism, can mobilize.

Conclusion

I have drawn a series of links here between classical anarchism and contemporary radical political thought, particularly on questions of state power, political subjectivity, non-party militant organization and the discourse of emancipation. I have suggested that despite their avoidance of the term, contemporary political thinkers from the continental tradition converge closely with anarchism. Their approach entails a non-Statist, anti-institutional form of politics that rejects traditional modes of party representation, eschews Marxist economism, and yet remains faithful to the ideals of unconditional liberty and equality—in short, an anti-authoritarian and egalitarian politics of postanarchism. Postanarchism signifies the relevance, importance and potential of the

anarchist tradition today, as well as the need for a renewal of this tradition through a critique of its epistemological foundations. At a time of political and ideological transition, when new movements and identities are emerging, and new sites of struggle are opening up, anarchism—for so long overshadowed by Marxism—can perhaps become the referent for a radical politics of the future.

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Notes

1. Here a parallel can be drawn with Foucault, whose genealogical analysis also sought to expose the myth of sovereignty: rather than sovereignty being based on juridical right, it is based on violent domination and conquest. The role of the genealogist, according to Foucault, is to "awaken beneath the form of institutions and legislations the forgotten past of real struggles, of masked victories or defeats, the blood that has dried on the codes of law" (1976: 17-18).
2. Badiou has called these movements "archaic and sterile" because, he argues, they conform to traditional models of protest, congregating around the meetings of their adversary—the IMF, G8 or WTO (see 2003).
3. Here Badiou would appear to diverge from anarchism in his insistence on the need for revolutionary discipline—invoking Lenin's notions of "iron discipline" and the "professional revolutionary." However, he separates these from the formal structure of the revolutionary party itself. In other words, he seems to advocate a form of disciplined militancy without the need for a formal party structure (2005: 75).

4 These thinkers have been critical of postmodernism/poststructuralism's questioning of the dialectic and the idea of rational objective truth. Bookchin, for instance, wants to retain the Hegelian idea—strongly held by classical anarchism—of the progressive unfolding of an immanent social rationality and a belief in human progress, and has attacked what he sees as "postmodern" relativism (see Bookchin 1995; Zerzan 1991).

5. See Frederick Gregory's discussion of scientific materialism (1977).
6. Bakunin: "Having shown how idealism, starting with the absurd ideas of God, immortality and the soul, the *original* freedom of individuals, and their morality independent of society, inevitably arrives at the consecration of slavery, I now have to show how real science, materialism and socialism—the second term being but the true and complete development of the first, precisely because they take as their starting point the material nature and the natural and primitive slavery of men, and because they bind themselves to seek the emancipation of men not outside but within society, not against it but by means of it—are bound to end in the establishment of the greatest freedom of individuals and the highest form of human morality" (1984: 146).
7. Rancière: "The distribution of places and roles that defines a police regime stems as much from the assumed spontaneity of social relations as from the rigidity of state functions" (1999: 29).

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